
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the January meeting of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II

History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is John Mosier, an English Professor from Loyola University of New Orleans, and author of *The Blitzkrieg Myth*. Joined by veterans of the Eastern European front, he will show the flaws in the German offensive tactics that eventually failed.

A "myth" is a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation. The word *blitzkrieg* literally translated means "lightning war." On a strategic level *blitzkrieg* came to mean a series of short decisive battles to defeat the enemy before they can recover, while on a tactical level the word means the use of a combined military effort of infantry, armor, and aircraft to overwhelm the enemy into defeat. A useful analogy would be the "safety blitz" in American football; all the defensive linemen rush the quarterback in one effort, but then the safety, who normally covers a wide receiver, surprises the offense by also rushing the quarterback and if no other offensive player blocks him, he is able sack the quarterback.

The usage for the word *blitzkrieg* follows along well with the word myth. There has never been a doubt about what the word meant,

although its prominence in World War II history becomes shrouded in the historical swamps. Many historians have said that the term was part of the Third Reich's German General Staff's formal strategic doctrine of how the war should be fought, and deemed it revolutionary. This might have been the case, except that the word *blitzkrieg* does not appear in the places it is supposed to: German military documents. Other historians have wrongly attributed its beginnings to German General Heinz Guderian and Adolf Hitler. This is false. Adolf Hitler when he first heard the term believed it to be of "Italian origin". While in Guderian's two most famous works *Achtung – Panzer!* and *Panzer Leader* the term is never mentioned even though he was supposedly the father of *blitzkrieg*.

Blitzkrieg had always been a part of what historians now call a German "way of war." Since the time of the Great Elector the Prussians/Germans engaged in wars of maneuver and speed. They had no choice. They never had the resources to carry out wars of attrition. After World War I, the Germans had the most incentive to find new techniques for making war. The attrition of the Western Front led to their defeat. In the post- World War I era, a "codification" of the German way of war for the modern era occurred, but never wavered from its roots. The father of this modern codification was Hans von Seeckt, the first commander-in-chief of the *Reichswehr* (the German Army during the Weimar Republic). Forced, because of the Treaty of Versailles restrictions, to limit the army to

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

100,000 men, von Seeckt prepared his forces for mobility and surprise. He became determined not to be bogged down in a war of attrition. In the 1924, *Die Truppenführung* emphasized a number of crucial ideas: decentralized, mission oriented orders; speed and exploitation of enemy weaknesses whether on the offensive or defensive; troop commanders using initiative and taking advantage of developing situations without waiting for orders; and, a close integration and cooperation among combat branches. While not seen as the creator, von Seeckt shaped the army for what would become “blitzkrieg”.

Blitzkrieg’s origins become irrelevant in light of the historical events which took place between 1939 and 1941. These are the years of the Third Reich’s military successes, starting with Poland in 1939 and ending with the Soviet Union in 1941. With the invasion of Poland, the term Blitzkrieg was first used in the United States, in *TIME* magazine, in their description of the invasion. The Germans defeated the Poles in little over a month, the Norwegians in nine weeks, and the French in five weeks. The logistical nightmare of the Soviet Union’s land mass and population size ultimately defeated the Third Reich “revolutionary” tactics. *Blitzkrieg’s* shadowy origins do not detract from its effectiveness at the strategic or tactical level, and should be considered part of any country’s military doctrine.

Further Readings:

John Mosier, *The Blitzkrieg Myth* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2005).

James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Modern War Studies) (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1992).

Robert Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster: The Development of French Army Doctrine, 1919-1939* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1985)

Eugenia C. Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler: France and the Limits of Military Planning* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1996).

R.H.S. Stolfi, *Hitler’s Panzer East: World War II Reinterpreted* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press 1991).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -

Jan. 20, 2015 – Steamship Sultana -

www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com

St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Jan. 26, 2015 – Carbines, Cavalry & Re-enacting - 715-

386-1268 – rossandhaines@comcast.net

Rochester WWII History Round Table –507-280-

9970; www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000

Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050,

<http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser -

crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717

CAF - Commemorative Air Force -

www.cafmn.org 651-455-6942

Minnesota Air Guard Museum -

www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523

Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN,

320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621,

<http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

Airshow - Eden Prairie - 11/12 July 2015

www.wotn.org 952-746-6100

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2015

12 Feb. Italian Struggle

12 Mar. Logistics of War

26 Mar. Return to the Philippines

9 Apr. Air War in the Mediterranean

14 May Retrospective: Goals of WW2 Leaders

See our programs on YouTube at <http://youtube.com/ww2hrt>